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ABSTRACT

As part of its school restructuring work with states, the National Governors' Association sponsored a March 1988 working meeting of experts to define common issues confronting educators and policymakers. Besides initiating dialogue between these groups, the meeting concentrated discussion on early state and district efforts. This essay summarizes the session's major themes, identifies school restructuring obstacles, outlines emergent strategies in use, and offers guidance to state-level policymakers. Challenges to schools include student performance, the crisis in the supply of teaching talent, and accountability. According to participants, many internal obstacles to change exist, including an unwarranted sense of safety and security in the present structure, educators' hesitancy to become responsible for standards and success criteria, treatment of the teaching and learning task as less important than one's role in the system, unwillingness to take risks, and the difficulty of connecting reform proposals to everyday school life. External constraints against school-level change are an already crowded policy agenda, competing and conflicting reform messages, and unrealistic implementation schedules. Next, ways to promote public awareness, fit "little tries" into comprehensive plans, and cope with middle-management behavior are discussed. Finally, examples of state strategies from Arkansas, Maine, Massachusetts, and Washington are presented. States have generally chosen a project-grant-and-waiver strategy relying heavily on school-level initiative. Challenges facing states are also summarized. An appendix contains a list of participants. (MLH)

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EARLY EXPERIENCE IN RESTRUCTURING SCHOOLS: VOICES FROM THE FIELD

BY
RICHARD F. ELMORE

RESULTS IN EDUCATION

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CENTER FOR POLICY RESEARCH
NATIONAL GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION

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FOREWORD

In the early 1980s, state policymakers and educators began a debate about the purposes, effects, and structures of schooling in America. The first phase of this debate resulted in major state initiatives directed at increasing standards for students and teachers. The second phase, initiated by the Carnegie report, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* and the Holmes Group report, *Tomorrow's Teachers*, both on the profession of teaching, and the National Governors' Association's 1986 report, *Time For Results: The Governors' 1991 Report on Education*, has produced recommendations for major changes in the way schools are organized and in the rules and incentives under which they operate. If the watchword of the first phase was "excellence," for the second phase it is "restructuring." Interest in restructuring among policymakers and professionals grows from the conviction that schools must change the way they organize the work of students, teachers, and administrators if they are to meet the increasing expectations and demands of society.

To sustain the momentum fostered by these reports, NGA has assumed a leadership role to work with states on restructuring initiatives. As a part of that work, NGA sponsored a working meeting in March 1988, bringing together experts in the field who support, develop, and implement programs at the state, district, and school building level to help define the common issues educators and policymakers must address.

The meeting initiated a much needed dialogue on restructuring between educators and policymakers at all levels. Efforts to restructure education will have to stretch from the school house to the state house and individuals at all levels must engage in a continuing dialogue to better understand the connections that must be made between building, district, and state restructuring efforts. The working session also provided a chance to distill the lessons being learned from early state and district efforts. School, district, and state projects now are far enough along for participants to gain critical insights, to identify obstacles to implementation, to recognize pitfalls, and to share and encourage best practices. This information will serve to inform policy decisions at all levels.

Defining Restructuring

A fundamental restructuring of the education system requires attention to several aspects of the current organization and structure of American schooling.

Curriculum and Instruction must be modified to promote the acquisition of higher order skills for *all* students. Modifications should increase flexibility in the use of instructional time, promote learning activities that are substantially more challenging and engaging, and encourage more varied grouping arrangements that promote student interaction and cooperative efforts but are not limited to conventional age-grading practices.

Authority and Decisionmaking must be decentralized, so the most educationally important decisions are made at the school site—not at the central office or the state capitol. Teachers, administrators, and parents should work together in setting the basic direction for the school, and in determining the strategies, approaches, and organizational and instructional arrangements required to achieve them.

New Staff Roles must be developed, so that teachers can more readily work together to improve instruction, and so experienced and talented teachers can support beginning teachers, plan and develop new curricula, or design and implement staff development programs. This is frequently not possible under current arrangements, where the teacher's role is largely limited to instructing and supervising students. Other staff roles must change as well. Greater use of paraprofessionals could be considered. And staffing innovations will require even more of principals. They need to supply the vision to help shape new school structures and organization arrangements, the skill to lead talented teachers, and the willingness to take risks in an environment that rewards performance rather than compliance.

Accountability Systems must clearly link rewards and incentives to student performance at the building level. Currently, schools are bound by state and local rules and regulations. They must have more discretion and authority to achieve the results we expect and need and then be held accountable

for results. States must develop measures to assess valued outcomes of performance of individual schools and link rewards and sanctions to results.

This essay by Richard F. Elmore summarizes the major themes and lessons learned from the March 1988 meeting. It identifies obstacles, both internal and external, that are central to restructuring schools. Next, it outlines some strategies that have emerged from the early experience of school- and district-level practitioners. Finally, it offers guidance to state-level policymakers interested in initiating pilot programs to change the structure of schools. We believe that educators and policymakers alike will find this discussion both informative and helpful.

Dean Honetschlager, Director
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EMERGING CHALLENGES

Most advocates of restructured schools believe that schools as they are presently organized are inadequate to meet at least three emerging challenges. The first challenge is performance. In order to sustain the quality of life we presently enjoy in a changing world political and economic order, we will have to educate *all* students to a much higher level of basic knowledge and conceptual understanding than we have yet been able to accomplish. Prevailing notions of "normal practice" in schools – teaching is telling, knowledge is the accumulation of facts, and learning is recall – will have to be replaced by more powerful ideals that emphasize the role of the teacher as empowering and enabling students to take control of their own learning, and of students as increasingly responsible for their own intellectual and moral development.

The second challenge is to avert a growing crisis in the supply of professional talent. Schools are at an increasing disadvantage in recruiting and retaining the kind of professional talent necessary to meet performance requirements. Females, the traditional source of skilled talent for schools, now have a more diverse array of career opportunities. There are substantial salary differentials between teaching and other occupations requiring similar levels of skill and knowledge. Perhaps most important the school work environment lacks some of the basic prerequisites for professional work: access to frequent collegial interaction about complex problems of practice, access to the knowledge required to enhance professional development, differential rewards for people who develop knowledge and skill at a significantly higher level than their colleagues, and access to the basic resources necessary to good performance.

The third challenge is accountability. School bureaucracies provide myriad excuses for the current shortcomings of public education: the purposes of school are multiple and diffuse, public schools do not choose their clientele, those with unequal needs must be treated equally, established structures are difficult to mobilize around new purposes, job security and contractual arrangements make changes in the definition of work difficult, and so forth. The public and the policy community are, however, increasingly impatient with

these explanations for schools' inability to meet higher expectations, especially when organizations in the public and private sectors undergo dramatic and often painful changes to meet similar expectations. Underlying many present reforms is a thinly veiled threat to public education: Change or see your responsibilities and clients drift away to other organizations. "Take responsibility for results and find an organizational form that manifests this responsibility" is the message schools are often hearing from their clients and constituents.

School reformers have never had difficulty creating a few schools that exemplify very different approaches to teaching and learning. The main challenge confronting those engaged in the current generation of school restructuring is to change the way large numbers of schools work. This broader challenge means not only school-by-school change, but also significant changes in the way local districts and states relate to schools.

It is against the backdrop of these challenges that the restructuring discussion occurred.

OBSTACLES TO RESTRUCTURING SCHOOLS

Internal Constraints: The Work Culture in Schools

A major theme that emerged at the meeting is the way in which the current climate or culture in schools impedes reform. Participants generally agreed that internal obstacles to change can be tough to overcome.

Facing Major Work Changes. Holly Houston of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards said that changing the way schools work requires teachers and administrators to be willing to "conceive of their jobs as presently defined becoming obsolete." Investing students with increased power and responsibility for their own learning, she said, requires adults to change their own conceptions of who they are and what they do. Investing teachers with a new sense of their responsibility as "coaches" for student learning, for example, requires teachers to address deeper attitudes and behaviors about their work, not simply to master new techniques of pedagogy.

School restructuring, Houston observed, requires a "firm conception of what success will look like" and an understanding among teachers that "an absence of standards and criteria for achieving success is a disservice to one's colleagues."

Likewise, Robert McClure of the National Education Association observed that one of the most powerful barriers to changing the way teachers and administrators conceive of their responsibilities is a "faith in the current technologies of education – objectives, tests, textbooks, etc." Faced with implementing the principle that "every decision that can be made at the school level should be made there," many educators are unable to conceive of alternatives to current technologies or to envision ways of taking advantage of new authority and responsibility. Another major barrier to devolving greater authority and responsibility to schools, McClure noted, is the structural isolation of teachers' work, which means that "teachers hardly know each other professionally, even though they may know each other personally."

Safety in the Status Quo. Edward Ortiz, superintendent of schools in Santa Fe, New Mexico, similarly argued that many

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teachers are "in love with the existing system" because it provides them a safe and predictable working environment. A new vision of authority and responsibility cannot emerge, he continued, unless teachers are encouraged and led to question the value of the existing structure for most students and to see how their work could improve if certain conditions were changed.

A major challenge, according to Ronn Robinson, Governor's education aide from the state of Washington, is changing a "workforce attracted to a culture of safety and certainty" into a professional workforce that seeks uncertainty, challenge, and change.

The Need to Take Risks. Changing the fundamental conditions of teaching and learning for teachers and students means taking risks, argued Terry Brooks, a former middle school principal and now administrative liaison in the Jefferson County (Kentucky) Public Schools. Educators can't wait for clear signals from their constituencies, he stated. They must take the risks entailed in leading public perceptions for what schools should be. Brooks criticized prescriptions for reform that come from "school reformers who haven't recently been in schools." He remarked that teachers have to see "near-term improvements" in learning for students in order to invest their energy in reform projects, and that most restructuring proposals don't pay attention to this basic source of motivation for teachers. External interventions, he suggested, should be evaluated in terms of whether they "undermine or promote teachers' confidence in their ability to make judgments" instead of enhancing the status of external intervenors.

"Most rules that teachers cite as constraints to doing what is best for kids simply don't exist, or aren't binding if they do exist," said Gerald O. Dreyfuss, a former principal and assistant superintendent for school-based management in the Dade County Public Schools (Miami, Florida). The problem, he observed, is not so much the constraints that operate on teachers, but teachers' own sense of what they can change. Brian Benzel, a local superintendent from Washington and chair of that state's Schools for the 21st Century advisory board, argued that school people are adept at arguing that

"they won't let us do that." A major task for school restructuring, he continued, should be "getting rid of all the 'they's'" who provide excuses for inaction.

Connecting Reform to the Daily Life of Schools. Kenneth Tewel, a consultant to schools undertaking change, observed that in the daily life of schools the problem is not an inadequate supply of good ideas for reform but rather that "everything looks like a good thing to do from the inside." Creating "focus and selectivity, avoiding abrupt shifts in direction dictated by external pressures, and sustaining professional commitment on the part of teachers that moves beyond personal relationships" are necessary conditions to changing the way people in schools conceive their responsibilities.

Teaching and the Knowledge Base. Robert McClure suggested that a key condition of structural change in schools is getting teachers to "see that the knowledge base [original research on teaching and learning] is part of the structure of their school." Holly Houston agreed that treating teaching as an uncertain and highly discretionary activity requires acknowledging that teachers are problem solvers, and problem solving requires access to knowledge.

Summary. Internal obstacles to school change, as participants saw them, then, include an unwarranted sense of safety and security in the present structure, educators' hesitancy to assume responsibility for standards and criteria for success, treating the task of teaching and learning as less important than the role one plays in the existing system, a lack of risk taking, and the difficulty of connecting proposals for reform to the daily life of schools.

External Constraints on School Restructuring

Jane David argues in her paper, "The Puzzle of Structural Change," that the process of changing schools cannot be conceived purely as a school-level problem, since every change within a school is connected to some structural feature outside the school that influences the likelihood of its success. She uses the metaphor of a jigsaw puzzle to describe the interdependency of discrete pieces of structural change, within

and outside schools. Meeting participants supported this view of the process of structural change.

Intrusions from the Outside. Several participants observed that although current restructuring reforms assume that schools will create a coherent sense of mission, the reality is that schools must manage multiple and conflicting environmental demands. Richard Card, a state education agency official from Maine, surveyed districts in his state that decided not to participate in a developmental program to restructure schools. Among the reasons they gave for declining the invitation to participate were: the invitation was not prescriptive enough, competing priorities and activities, lack of support within the district, and uncertainty about the state's "real agenda" in sponsoring the program. Although the Maine initiative was specifically designed to stimulate initiative and creativity in schools, it was perceived by nonparticipants as another intrusion from the outside.

Standard-setting Versus Restructuring Policies. A number of state and local participants observed that there are deep inconsistencies in content, rhetoric, and expectations between the reforms of the early 1980s (the so-called first-wave reforms), which are largely focused on uniformity, standard-setting and regulation, and current restructuring proposals, which focus on school and district initiative. Tom Corcoran, an education consultant, said, "The dominant reform movement is still characterized by heavy centralization and standardization. People are still conditioned to believe in truisms, tablets, and magic cures." These conflicting policy agendas, participants observed, will create serious dissonance at the school level.

Differing Timelines. A tendency to expect quick results, or unrealistic expectations about the time and complexities entailed in serious changes of school structure, are other constraints on school-level efforts. Robert McClure described what he called the "Halloween Syndrome," in which school-level planning and district support for restructuring proceed at a rapid pace through the summer and early fall, leveling off after Halloween. Sophie Sa, executive director of the Matsushita Foundation, which has been engaged in school

restructuring efforts, said that "the way to create change is to stay with it for a long time," but noted that many actors outside the school are impatient for immediate results. Terry Brooks likewise argued that anything other than superficial change requires "more than the six weeks that many people expect," and the deliberate creation of a setting in which "people are encouraged to work it out for themselves" with sustained support from outside.

Summary. The main external constraints to school-level change, from the perspective of participants, then, were an already crowded policy agenda, competing and conflicting messages embodied in previous reform proposals, and unrealistic expectations about the time it takes to mount a serious effort.

DISTRICT AND SCHOOL-LEVEL STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE CHANGE

Promoting Public Awareness

Acknowledging Failures. Edward Ortiz argued that people will be willing to change the way schools work when they openly acknowledge the failings of the present system. "The factory model of schooling," which he believed characterizes the existing structure, "is bad because it does not serve the educational needs of large numbers of students. It is important for teachers to question what the system does to students and to understand that we don't have the answers," Ortiz said. "There is no one solution, or we would have discovered it a long time ago. The important thing is to get people in schools to start solving the problems they see in their schools." His strategy is to encourage teachers to question what is going on within schools, to create broad structures for participation of teachers at the school and district level, to make time available for school-level planning, to be visible and accessible himself, and to let teachers know that they can have direct access to him when they need it.

Encouraging Subversive Behavior. School consultant Kenneth Tewel similarly argued that people in schools "need an invitation to be subversive," to act on their knowledge and understanding of what needs changing, and to take responsibility for their successes and failures. Gerald Dreyfuss echoed this theme, saying that district-level people must identify and legitimate "pirate principals," who have been successful at subverting bureaucratic requirements to focus on teaching and learning. These invitations to subversive behavior must be made by people in formal district leadership roles in order to legitimate and mobilize teachers and principals.

Changing Expectations. John Murphy, superintendent of schools in Prince George's County, Maryland, said that district leaders have to "concentrate on the system surrounding teachers in order to reduce constraints and encourage teachers and principals to assume authority." Getting serious restructuring started, he stated, is "a process of educating people on what to expect" – more authority, responsibility, and visibility.

Support at the District Level. In Santa Fe, Dade County, Rochester, and Louisville, school-level restructuring was preceded by significant actions at the district level that signalled support. In each case, key district-level actors created a political coalition and stabilized key political relationships. The members of these coalitions included district administrators, board members, teachers' organization representatives, and community members. Putting these actors together early makes it possible to resolve later problems.

Getting Underway

Fitting "Little Tries" into a Comprehensive Plan. Most district and school participants in restructuring activities subscribe to the "ready, fire, aim" strategy popularized by Thomas Peters and Robert Waterman in *In Search of Excellence*. It is more important, the argument goes, to initiate small actions and adjust them to feedback than it is to develop a comprehensive plan before acting. For example, Terry Brooks characterized his system's strategy as myriad "little tries" that aggregate into broader changes in attitudes and practice. In Louisville, this strategy translates into six high schools involved in the Coalition of Essential Schools, twenty-three middle schools committed to restructuring plans, and twenty-four professional development schools that will serve as clinical settings for practice and training new teachers and administrators. Some schools are involved in more than one initiative.

In Dade County, the district sent a request for proposals to all schools in the district to elicit participation in a restructuring project – fifty-four proposals were received and thirty-three were selected. These projects involve broad budgetary discretion at the school level, flexible staffing arrangements between teachers and administrators, school-level control over curriculum and scheduling, and significant time for collaborative work.

The major potential weakness of the "little tries" strategy, participants agreed, was that it might result in diffuse and incoherent changes. For this reason, participants recommended that schools be given the time and authority necessary to dis-

cuss and formulate a vision of what they want their school to look like in the future. Even though they change over time, these visions provide ways of discerning the importance of little tries to achieving overall goals.

Participation without Gridlock. All district and school restructuring efforts involve not only broad structures of participation, but also explicit or implicit agreements that participation cannot be used to obstruct action. Edward Ortiz stated this principle explicitly: "Everyone comments, no one disapproves." Ortiz convened a district-level executive committee composed of teachers to signal open access. The central idea is that participation structures should provide open access, not only to encourage and mobilize support, but also to provide the access to advice without judgment. Participation, however, should reinforce and accelerate action rather than provide an excuse for inaction.

Providing Time for Participation. Participation and concerted action require time away from regular school duties and time to develop and implement new ideas. Sophie Sa and Holly Houston were among a number of participants who underscored the strategic importance of making time available to teachers, of signalling district and school-level commitment to serious changes, and of providing time during the school day to consider broader issues.

New Skills Are Needed. In addition to time, participants noted that teachers and administrators need new skills to assume new roles and adapt to new expectations in new structures. Most districts have responded to this need by giving people in schools access to outside consultants for assistance in developing problem-solving skills and by using early planning as an occasion for skill development. All participants agreed, though, that traditional staff development or training, which typically involves learning a prescribed curriculum or instructional style, is inappropriate because it diverts responsibility away from teachers to develop their own sense of purpose and to implement it through instructional approaches.

Who's In and Who's Out

Middle Management: A Barrier. A number of participants identified district middle management as the source of a major strategic problem for school-level changes. In some instances, districts have relied on central office personnel—curriculum and testing specialists, for example—to implement district- and state-level mandates, often without processes designed to assure school-level ownership of those mandates. In other instances, district personnel have established their roles based on implementation of district-wide instructional improvement strategies that allow little room for school-level adaptation. In still other instances, district staff have failed to establish any credible working relationship with school-level personnel. In a few instances, they have managed to develop the skills necessary to enable and support school-level decisionmaking.

The major choice confronting district leadership, then, is whether to bypass middle management, to reduce their influence by reassigning them to school-level positions in instances where they may not support school-level decisionmaking, or to change their roles without changing their formal positions. Most districts leaders represented at the meeting have chosen, largely for short-term expediency, to bypass middle management and focus directly on schools. Most also agree, however, that this will not work as a long-term strategy. In some instances, opposition is already building within central office staff to increased school-level decisionmaking, and this opposition will require a response.

Strategies for Coping with Middle Management. One tactic used in the private sector that may be adaptable to public schools is to have people in middle management and staff support roles rewrite their job descriptions, defining their work solely in terms of what they contribute to school-level results. Those who are unable find a credible connection to school-level decisionmaking become obvious targets for reassignment. Another tactic, used in at least two of the districts represented at the meeting, is to staff central office positions with people who are on partial or temporary assignment from schools, insuring that middle management maintain a credible

connection to schools and creating mobility through staff support jobs.

The major lesson of the discussion of middle management, however, is that changes in school-level authority and responsibility must inevitably reverberate through the whole organizational structure of local districts. It is impossible to change the role of school-level personnel significantly without undermining the rationale for the traditional district administrative structure. The key management problem for district leadership is how to create district-level organization that adequately reflects their school-level objectives.

Strategies for Resolving Conflicts. Channels for conflict resolution were a final theme in discussions of school- and district-level strategies. As noted earlier, Edward Ortiz uses a district-level executive committee composed of teachers to surface and resolve issues related to school restructuring in Santa Fe. Rochester's ambitious new school restructuring agenda grows out of a major four-way agreement negotiated among parents, the teachers' union, the board, and the administration. Dade County's strategy evolved out of negotiations between the district and the union, and now includes provisions for the engagement of the major interests in a coalition to support school-level decisionmaking. David Florio, a participant in early Dade County negotiations as a teachers' organization representative, noted that all of the districts represented at the meeting seemed to have developed strong working relationships among key constituent groups before they initiated restructuring projects.

Summary. The common themes, then, from discussion of school- and district level restructuring strategies are:

- calling attention explicitly to the rationale for restructuring, anchored in how well existing schools serve the full range of students;
- developing a series of "little tries" and "quick wins" that motivate school-level personnel to stay engaged, and allowing them time and resources to act on their convictions;
- developing strategies for making district-level structures support school-level decisionmaking; and
- providing channels for the resolution of conflict surrounding restructuring efforts.

WHAT STATES CAN DO TO SUPPORT RESTRUCTURING

All state and local participants noted the obvious tension, described earlier, between state-level mandates and uniform standards in the reforms of the early 1980s compared with the emphasis on school-level initiative and decisionmaking in the late 1980s. State Representative Gloria Cabe, who also advises the Governor on education issues in the state of Arkansas, said that she believes school restructuring is a logical progression from a focus on minimum standards of performance to a focus on higher order student learning. The key future challenge to states, she remarked, is how to "run on two tracks at once, the regulatory track and the encouragement and support track." Thomas Corcoran observed that states will always be caught in the bind between regulation and assistance, and that both "top-down" and "bottom-up" elements will always be components of state policy. The challenges for states, he asserted, are to provide incentives for districts and schools to sustain restructuring to model the kind of behavior expected of districts and schools and to broaden existing state monitoring and assessment systems so as not to penalize schools and districts that make progress on important dimensions of student learning that are difficult to assess.

Examples of State Strategies

The states represented at the meeting are pursuing a variety of strategies to encourage district- and school-level action.

Arkansas. Arkansas' program began with an invitation to fifteen districts to participate in major restructuring initiatives. In order to be selected, districts had to be ready to undertake an effort, in the state's judgment, and to meet the letter and spirit of the state's new school accreditation standards. Participating districts were then invited to attend an initial conference, in which personnel from one school and the district level worked together to develop a longer term vision of what they wanted to achieve. The state has offered technical assistance in the development of plans, and schools are encouraged to ask for waivers from those state regulations they feel constrain their ability to accomplish their plans. Seven

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schools have been added in the second year of the program. The Arkansas program currently involves no direct financial assistance to schools.

Maine. Maine's program is funded by a state project grant with provision for waivers on request for all state regulations except those dealing with health, safety, and civil rights. The state assisted teams from twenty-five schools in using research findings to develop plans for restructuring. The three-year grants were made in two tiers—one tier provided major awards of $50,000 per year for three schools, the other tier provided $10,000 for seven schools to continue to plan. The proposal review process was used, in part, to orient applicants to the work of other schools; one participant on each review panel was from another applicant school.

Massachusetts. Massachusetts has embarked on two school restructuring programs, one designed to encourage "Carnegie Schools," growing out of the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, and another designed to encourage Professional Development Schools, or exemplary clinical settings for teachers that grow out of collaboration between universities and schools. The Carnegie Schools strategy included a component of state-wide consultation in six regional forums leading up to the award of $30,000 to each of seven projects. The state conducted a retreat for representatives from the schools selected for pilot projects, stressing skill building and the creation of school-level vision. The Professional Development School program entails adapting a school-level clinical training program to a statewide strategy for the elimination of the undergraduate teaching major.

Washington. Washington Schools for the 21st Century program, through a competitive grant program, supports schools for planning time, staff development, technical assistance, and linkages to colleges and universities. A central feature of the program is a provision allowing schools to request waivers from state law and regulation that they see as constraining their ability to accomplish their objectives. The program also includes a proviso for concurrence among key actors, including school administrators, the board, teachers' organizations, and the business community. Fifteen schools

and six districts were selected to share in more than $2 million in state funds during the program's first year. Staff from the twenty-one projects attended a Governor's conference where they had an opportunity to gain a national perspective on school reform and share ideas with each other.

The Grants and Waivers Strategy

As these examples illustrate, states have, for the most part, chosen a project grant and waiver strategy that relies heavily on school-level initiative. States have considerable prior experience administering project grant programs that can be brought to bear on the objective of school restructuring. The new element of state strategy is the introduction of waiver provisions. These provisions represent the commitment of Governors, in the wake of the NGA reports, to reduce state policy constraints in return for greater school-level commitment to students results.

The experience of states with waivers bears watching, since it involves highly sensitive political and administrative issues with a potentially high impact on school structure and performance. States continue to struggle with how to provide assistance to districts and schools in a policy atmosphere that increasingly emphasizes state regulation and control. How states organize to deal with this tension will be an important issue to track in the emerging reforms.

Focusing on Schools Versus Districts

A state-level strategic issue that stimulated considerable discussion was whether states should focus on districts or schools as the point of intervention for school restructuring policies. One argument was that states should provide assistance mainly to schools, with limited attention to districts, because if restructuring is to have any impact, it must occur first at the school level. Middle managers at the district level have the capacity to undermine initiatives that are run through districts, and if schools change to demonstrate results with students, then district-level policies will follow.

The opposing argument is that the point of intervention should be at the district level because in the absence of district support, no serious restructuring will occur across a large number of schools; the main actors who have to coalesce around large scale changes in school structure operate at the district, not the school level—teachers' organizations, business community interests, and the like; and state bypass of local governance structures can have longer term adverse effects on political support for state initiatives. The majority opinion among participants favors districts, as opposed to schools, as the unit of intervention, but some argued that state restructuring efforts could become mired in district-level politics without ever reaching the school level.

Challenges to States

Providing More Technical Assistance. States face a variety of other strategic challenges as they launch restructuring initiatives. One challenge is that state departments of education will be expected to play a larger role than they have traditionally played in assisting schools and districts. Participants were concerned that most state departments were not organized to perform these tasks and did not have sufficient staff resources to respond to district requests for assistance.

Expecting Quick Versus Long-term Results. Another challenge is the tension between expectations from elected officials that investments in school restructuring will produce quick results and the organizational realities of school systems that require long-term commitment to change. Participants were concerned that lack of progress could discredit school restructuring programs in the eyes of state policymakers before they had time to produce significant results.

Expanding Pilot Waiver Programs. Still another challenge facing states is how to deal with the broader consequences of pilot programs. As pilot restructuring projects get underway and as schools become more adept at asking for state regulation waivers, state policymakers will face the complex issues of how far to extend participation and whether widespread waivers should be translated into policy changes.

These changes could stimulate comprehensive reviews of state regulatory structures with broad effects on the state's role in education.

Issues of Equity. A final challenge facing states is how to manage the equity effects of project grant programs. Project grants inherently reward entrepreneurial districts and schools with the motivation and the resources to write persuasive and attractive proposals. Increasingly, as restructuring efforts advance, states will face the issue of how to get to districts and schools with fewer resources committed to change.

Participants concurred that the major challenges facing states are:

- how to mesh school restructuring efforts with the earlier wave of centralizing and standardizing reforms;
- how to generate serious change and sustained commitment with limited resources and capacity at the state level;
- how to manage the emerging political issues around waivers of state law and regulation; and
- how to balance the interests and claims of schools and districts in the administration of restructuring programs.

Conclusion

The challenges facing our nation require nothing less than a fundamental restructuring of the education system. But state and local efforts to restructure schools are still at the initial stage of policy development and implementation. It is crucial to share the knowledge base that is building as programs are developed and implemented. By letting decisionmakers know about the early lessons being learned and the insight being gained, state and local educators and policymakers will be helped over the bumpy path to policy implementation. The meeting was an initial conversation among parties whose support and work is critical to restructuring efforts. It is a conversation that must continue.

Appendix

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